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SUBJECT: BOLIVIA: PARTIES GEAR UP FOR 2009 ELECTIONS

REF: LA PAZ 2370

Classified By: EcoPol Chief Mike Hammer for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Bolivian presidential elections are expected to take place in December 2009 and "only" 15 parties are registered on the national level. Given that it takes a minimum of eight months to register a political party, unaffiliated candidates and parties with lapsed credentials have recognized there is not much time to spare, and are actively considering whether to make the effort to form new parties or update eligibility. As elections draw nearer, this situation is causing some parties to gear up to meet the registration deadline, while others are instead making new alliances (in order to take advantage of their partner party's eligibility). Former President Tuto Quiroga's opposition-leading PODEMOS party has seen its registration lapse, and he will likely break a prior partnership with the Century 21 party to ally with the Christian Democratic Party (PDC). Former Vice-President Victor Hugo Cardenas, who is being mentioned again in political circles as a possible candidate for either president or vice-president, is the titular head of the Revolutionary Liberation Movement Tupac Katari party, but his party has also lost its eligibility, and Cardenas is now seen as a free agent. With parties from both sides of the political spectrum looking to form a centrist coalition to defeat President Morales, we may see new alliances form and leadership shifts occur in the coming months. End summary.

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A Paucity of Parties  
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¶2. (C) Presidential elections are scheduled to be held in December 2009 if the new constitution passes (as expected) in January, and "only" 15 parties have maintained their national-level eligibility, according to a report by the National Electoral Court (CNE). While the Bolivian national political scene usually enjoys a very large number of parties, in the last 20 years, 36 parties have lost their eligibility, leaving only the current 15. According to leading daily La Razon, in 2007, fifteen new parties initiated applications to receive eligibility, but of these only three are considered active. These three include the Democratic Force (FD) party, led by Adriana Gil, a former

ally of Morales in Santa Cruz who now sees him as a "dictator" and his party as riddled with corruption; the Plurinational Alliance of West and East, led by Policarpio Castaneta; and the Front for Victory, led by Eliseo Rodriguez.

13. (C) Former President Tuto Quiroga's opposition-leading PODEMOS party has seen its registration lapse, and he will likely break a prior partnership with the Century 21 party to ally instead with the Christian Democratic Party (PDC). Although it leads the national-level opposition and has the most seats in the Senate, PODEMOS is widely seen as responsible for having failed to slow Evo's Morales Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) party and for having proposed a national recall referendum on the Presidency, Vice-Presidency, and regional Prefectures, which ultimately only strengthened Evo (Note: he obtained 67 percent support and the opposition lost two key prefectures - La Paz and Cochabamba. End note.). PODEMOS' slide is seen by some as having opened a political vacuum, either for a centrist coalition or for parties representing the more radical civic committees in the eastern, "Media Luna" part of the country.

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Eligible Parties  
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14. (U) The fifteen currently eligible parties include the following: President Morales' Movement Toward Socialism party, or MAS; the Century 21 party, led by Marcelo Bravo Porcel (which is recognized primarily for its alliance with opposition leaders PODEMOS); the National Unity Front, or UN, led by Samuel Doria Medina; the National Revolutionary Movement party, or MNR, which is the oldest party but currently without a leader; the Social Alliance party, or AS, led by Rene Joaquin Cabrera; the Plan for Bolivian Progress party, or PPB, led by Jose Luis Paredes (aka Pepe Lucho); the Movement Without Fear party, or MSM, led by Juan del Granado; the United Civic Solidarity party, or UCS, led by Jhonny Fernandez; and the Movement of United Social Patriotism, or MUSPA, led by Juan Gabriel Bautista.

15. (U) Other parties include the National Democratic Action party, the Left Revolutionary Front, the Christian Democratic Party, the Bolivian Social Democrats, the Villages for Liberty and Sovereignty party, and the National Concert party.

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Wheeling and Dealing  
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16. (C) UN Party leader Samuel Doria Medina has proposed to create a "United Front of the Left" to challenge President Evo Morales in the expected December 2009 elections (reftel). Such a "United Front," if it occurred, could help bring in currently unaffiliated politicians. Former President Carlos Mesa has reportedly been in conversations with Doria Medina regarding a potential spot under the "United Front" banner. (Note: As this effort is being spearheaded by Doria Medina, for eligibility purposes the United Front presumably would ally with the UN. End note.)

17. (C) Similarly, former Vice-President Victor Hugo Cardenas is also being mentioned in political circles as a possible candidate for either president or vice-president. Cardenas was the head of the Revolutionary Liberation Movement Tupac Katari party, but his party has lost its eligibility, and Cardenas is now seen as a free agent.

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Eligibility Requirements  
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18. (U) The process to register a national-level party takes approximately eight to nine months. A minimum of 57,476 signatures must be obtained within a period of six months, and the signatures are then verified by the CNE. A party's eligibility may be revoked for one of five reasons: first, if

a party declares itself defunct; second, if a party does not obtain more than three percent of the total votes cast in the last election in which they participated; third, if a party does not participate in two consecutive elections; fourth, if a party participates in a coup d'etat or other seditious acts; or last, if a party does not update its registration of enrolled supporters according to CNE rules.

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